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Since January, Assistant Senate Majority Leader Kim Lightford has led a series of intense negotiations meetings aimed at crafting a substantial education reform bill for Illinois. Throughout the process, education stakeholder groups have worked through the finer details on a number of issues that will ultimately affect teacher performance and school accountability.

Lightford, who will be conducting another meeting on Thursday, April 7, provided the media with a briefing of the progress that has been made and the disagreements that she hopes to resolve quickly.

So far, the group has agreed on reforms affecting teacher tenure, giving school leaders more flexibility in filling teaching vacancies and making sure that every class is taught by good teachers. In addition, Lightford says, other reforms to increase accountability for school administrators and potentially school board members are part of the discussions.

The goal, ultimately, is to ensure that a reform proposal continues to put Illinois public schools on a path to more accountability and better performance. Lightford is hopeful that this week's negotiation meeting will help finalize agreements to put into a comprehensive bill.

Lightford was picked by Senate President John Cullerton to lead the effort because of her past success in passing major reforms when Illinois sought hundreds of millions of federal dollars for the "Race to the Top" education reform challenge.